My name is Anindya Bhattacharyya but go by Bapin. I am totally deaf-blind and a fath4er of a 15-month-old hearing-sighted son. My wife is deaf.

As a member of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program committee here in California and as a consumer, I have five comments for FCC's assistance/consideration to make cell phones fully accessible that also meet the protocols and standardizations for universal design.

COMMENTS:
1. Deaf-blind people who have Deaf-Blind Communicators (DBCs go to www.humanware.com for details) only can communicate with those who have cell phones with text messaging capabilities. If I need to contact someone who does not have a phone with texting capability, then, I cannot call a relay service. I still have to text a friend and ask him/her to call that person.

Any way relay centers can take relay calls via text messaging? Can FCC hire a deaf-blind technologist/researcher to focus on this area and collect all necessary data from the deaf-blind community and possibly fund manufacturers to develop accessible cell phones? I am a technologist and technician and I provide training and technical support to deaf-blind people all over the U.S. I have not seen any deaf-blind individuals being employed by FCC or manufacturers who make cell phones or Braille notetakers.

2. A while ago I had a deaf handyman who renovated my house. He originally came from Bosnia and did not read or write very well. His only method of telecommunication was ASL via VP and VRS. He did not have a TTY or pager. Although he had an e-mail address, he did not feel comfortable communicating via e-mail because of his poor English. One time I tried to call him via VRS by using a regular TTY relay service. The interpreter kept hanging up on me saying "I am sorry, we cannot do relay to relay calls." This clearly restricted my ability to communicate with this deaf man directly. I texted my other deaf friend to VP this deaf handyman for me. But she said her call was rejected because this deaf handyman did not recognize
the number the call was coming from. Is there another way to resolve this? As you are well aware, more and more deaf people are discarding TTYs (they should keep them for 911 calls or for other emergencies), it is becoming almost impossible for totally deaf-blind people to communicate by phone with them.

Many people told me that I should start a deaf-blind VRS center but my fear is that FCC will not approve funding to cover the cost of communication facilitators (CFs) to interpret for deaf-blind people via tactile sign language. However, I can envision securing some type of funding to help with the cost of R&D to develop software and maybe hardware components where deaf-blind people can communicate with deaf people or VRS and receive typed responses from the other parties. I will not go into details, but in sh9rt, VRS interpreters are not required to have skills to type besides interpreting. This is something my deaf-blind VRS can do and I will need to pay the interpreters extra for using dual skills. I have also tried to get Sorenson interested in developing this such service, but they brushed it off saying the population was too small for them to invest their money into R&D.

3. iPhone 4 has a built-in screen reader called VoiceOver which is a great breakthrough in technological advancements for blind and deaf-blind people. While a blind person can get an iPhone 4 with 16GB of memory packaged with a 2-year contract for $199.00 and use it with speech right out of box, a deaf-blind person does not have this advantage. The cheapest Braille display on the market that can be used with a cell phone is $1,700.00. The same is true for blind and deaf-blind people who should choose to use cell phones of other operating systems and need to purchase screen readers and/or screen magnification programs for 300 to 1000 dollars more. Who can afford all of those?. Many state telecommunication access programs have not yet acquired cell phones with Braille displays for free telecommunication equipment distributions to deaf-blind residents saying the equipment do not have the required TTY feature for connections via landline phones. This policy is obsolete since everyone has been using a cell phone since 20 years. We deaf-blind people are pushed back to a corner and this needs to change now.

4. As a father of a son a little over one year old, I need to keep communicating with my wife about him and before too long, directly with him. My Deaf-Blind Communicator is too bulky to carry around as it uses two pieces - one Windows Mobile-based phone and a Braille Note mPower notetaker that is the size of a big book and weighs 3 to 4 pounds. I would like a cell phone with a built-in Braille display to be worn on my waist belt at all times and if there is an emergency, the phone will vibrate for me to quickly respond instead of scrambling to reach my bulky Braille notetaker to check for messages. I spent $8,000.00 on this equipment whose only working feature on the go is text messaging. Instant messaging via Google Chat and e-mail are possible, but they require WiFi, Ethernet, and dialup connectivity.

There are many possibilities with an accessible cell phone such as a life-saving tool for emergency situations involving getting info from my home security system regarding the status (I had to install the security system after a break-in last January). After discovery of the break-in upon coming home, I ran out to protect myself from the burglars who might still be in the house. Therefore, I did not have a way to call police and needed to go to my neighborâ€™s house for help. Suppose I got lost somewhere or got stuck somewhere with no access to transportation, how can I call for help? I cannot call a relay service via text messaging. Why am I stripped of equal access to many wonderful technologies in this world of technological advancements?

Since many manufactures are unwilling to fund RUD to design and manufacture such a cell phone with a built-in Braille display due to the paucity of the deaf-blind population, can FCC do something to fund this project? Many blind people are experiencing progressive hearing loss where they can benefit from Braille cell phones later unless the phones are made affordable for upfront purchases. This will improve blind peoples braille literacy dramatically since reports say 80% of the blind population barely ever read Braille!

5. When talking about an accessible cell phone, can there be an application to allow me to have real-time TTY conversations? There is already software to allow this on computers but none that I know of for use via cell phone operating systems. There are already developments to make VP and VRS possible on cell phones for the deaf. Deaf-blind people should not be excluded.